

Adoption month celebration shines the light on adoption challenges and triumphs

DANVILLE--For one family, adoption was a calling. For another, it was a way to complete a family. For 1,867 Illinois children in 2005, adoption led them home.

"Many of the children have never been offered love. It takes a family to say to them, 'I will love you no matter what,'" said Bernadine Spitz, a recruiter and coordinator of the Community Foster Care and Adoption committee.

To celebrate National Adoption Awareness Month, the committee honored 14 local agencies, businesses and people for their support of families who have adopted or fostered children at a private reception Saturday [November 18, 2006].

National Adoption Month began in 1990 as a way to bring awareness about the children waiting for adoption. Teens, sibling groups and special needs children often have a harder time finding a family, Spitz said.

There were a reported 234 children in foster care in Vermilion County as of March 2005; it was

not reported how many were adopted. More than half were under 10 years old.

"The community needs to be aware of what's happening out there. It really does take that village to raise a child," Spitz said.

Leslie Holycross has fostered between 20 and 30 children over the past 18 years. She's adopted four.

"The single most rewarding thing I've done is adopt special-needs kids," Holycross said.

Those set to be honored Saturday help families such as the Holycrosses through support groups, doctor visits or an understanding of the adoption process that makes getting services easier.

"Sometimes the issues kids have in foster care don't leave magically just because they're adopted," Holycross said.

Brian Makowski has also adopted four children. He said he and his wife, as Christians, felt a calling to do so.

"When you're really caught up in the foster care or adoption process, you can get down, get depressed. It really gets frustrating," he said.

Makowski said at first, he and his wife did not seek outside help such as a support group. Eventually, though, the couple joined one.

"There are all kinds of different issues that come up," Makowski said. "It's very, very important that you have some sort of support group there."

Spitz has adopted nine children and fostered more than 50.

"You have to love them but you have to do it knowing it's a true commitment," she said. "It's not filling your own cup but filling a child's cup."

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New Central Region Reporter

The Central Connections insert to the newsletter is a way to deliver news from all parts of the Central region. Sam Saladino from the Peoria field office is the new regional reporter. He is the point of contact for ideas about stories that affect DCFS and private agency homes in all of the DCFS Central Region.

Saladino has been with DCFS for 25 years. He has worked in investigations and, since 1988, has served foster families while carrying out various licensing duties. Now he is part of the Local Area Network team.

"I like knowing there are people out there that are interested in helping society and who put helping in front of their own interests and goals," said Saladino.

Since Central region cuts across a wide area of the state, it would be difficult for one person to cover without help. Saladino looks forward to hearing about happenings within the foster care community. This includes

- events sponsored by support groups and parent associations
- programs and services in the community
- resources to assist children and families

Contact information for Saladino is listed in the box on this page.

New programs to prepare Springfield-area youth for careers

The Department of Children and Family Services has launched an intensive effort to develop and implement programs downstate for youth in care that mirror programs in the Chicagoland area. Two new programs are now available in Springfield to ensure that youth have access to a variety of programs to assist in their positive growth and development.

The Springfield Urban League's WASSuP programs is available for DCFS youth ages 16 to 20 who are interested in an employment training program with an overall end goal of full employment. Designed for both youth in school and those who have left school prematurely, the Work-Attitude-School-Study Program (WASSuP) will provide a monetary stipend to those who comply with the program criteria. The program will focus on skill building, increasing academic performance, career development, self-directed learning options, structured mentoring sessions, individual tutoring instruction, job shadowing and on-the-job work experience. A graduation ceremony will be held at the conclusion of the program.

Additionally, the Springfield YWCA has developed a program for adolescent girls ages 12 to 16. Girls Awakening Power (GAP) will highlight the uniqueness of each participant, while also providing a

computer learning lab and homework tutoring. Exploring those career options available to women, and delving into friendships and other relationships with more support and less peer pressure are also topics available to the girls. The program will give them an excellent opportunity to investigate many other areas of interest.

The Department, the Springfield Urban League and the Springfield YWCA are all eager to get youth in these programs. Caregivers or older youth interested in learning more can contact Gail Simpson, DCFS Education and Transition Services Manager at 217-524-2425.

Central Connections

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Anyone can call the regional reporter with foster parent association news and schedules; local training notices; features on foster families and community members working for children; photos; and ideas for news articles or supportive services that would be helpful for caregivers to know.

Start the new year with an education “tune-up” with these tips

Educational issues may be confusing, and everyone needs help at some time. At this point, school has been in session long enough for issues to surface. The good news is that there is still time to address them. Caseworkers and caregivers working together most often successfully advocate for the children in their care. When you need more help, contact the DCFS Education Advisors. They provide educational support to families with licenses supervised by DCFS and to post-adoption and guardianship homes. Private agency homes can contact the education liaison at each agency.

- **Mary Chepulis**
DCFS – Springfield Sub-region
521 South 11th Street
Springfield, IL 62703
217-782-4000 or
217-557-3985
- **Ann Wells, Education Advisor**
DCFS Peoria Sub-region
2001 NE Jefferson Street
Peoria, IL 61603
309-671-7900 or
217-786-6847 (Springfield)
- **Vernessa Gipson, Education Advisor**
DCFS –Champaign Sub-region
45 East University Street
Champaign, IL 61820
217-355-5990

These tips from the education advisors can help caregivers prepare their students for success.

Keep communication lines open

In order to have the school year be successful it is important for both the caseworker and caregiver to have ongoing contact with the school. Some of the activities may include:

- Attend parent-teacher conferences and school functions
- Encourage the student's participation in academic and extracurricular activities
- Monitor homework
- Touch base with school teachers and related school personnel
- Review progress reports
- Arrange for individual problem solving meetings if needed
- Express your concerns before they turn into a crisis
- Express appreciation when things go right

Be proactive on homework

- **Set a Spot.** Have a 'homework spot' in the house. There should be a special desk or table that is simply for homework. There should be no outside distractions like television or the radio.
- **Set a Timer.** Do homework at the same time each day. Set a timer for when it starts and an alarm for when it ends.
- **Set Goals.** Have your child show you what he/she is going to do before going to the 'homework spot.' Have them explain what they are doing so you know they understand the directions.

- **See the Results.** Have your child show you what he/she accomplished during the time in the 'homework spot'. Don't grade it, but check it for completeness and neatness.
- **Control the homework.** Don't let it control you. If you make a routine a habit, it will become less threatening and more a part of life. Homework is supposed to help your child develop life skills such as time management.

Be involved in discipline plans

- School districts are required to provide students with copies of school discipline policies and to provide copies of discipline procedures upon request. Make sure you have copies, and review the procedures with the children for whom you are responsible.
- At any time a child is suspended more than twice in a semester the caseworker and caregiver should meet with the school and develop or revise a behavior plan for the student.
- For any student who faces expulsion the caregiver should contact the caseworker immediately. Through the DCFS Guardian's office, each child will be ensured legal representation, if needed.
- If any child is not enrolled in school or for assistance regarding suspensions and expulsions contact the appropriate education advisor's office.

Central Region Training Calendar

Important Information!

The DCFS Office of Training is realigning the training offerings across the state. Training for the regions is now coordinated by DCFS in Springfield. This shift includes many improvements to make it easier for caregivers to register for classes, track their training credits and participate in more classroom or Internet-based offerings.

The new schedules for In-Service training classes are being developed. When classes are confirmed, schedules will be announced on this page in future issues of IL Families Now and Forever. For more information call 877-800-3393.

DCFS Lending Library offers alternatives for education credits

The DCFS Lending Library can be used as a convenient alternative for obtaining approved training credit for license renewal. Licensed foster and adoptive parents can borrow materials for a two-week period at no charge.

The Lending Library catalogue highlights a multitude of books, audio cassettes and videos for self-directed training in parenting and family life, spanning 17 categories. Following are a few titles of interest:

Winning Cooperation From your Child

by Kenneth Wenning, Ph.D.

This book provides strategies for parents to help a defiant child develop behavioral and emotional control when provoked, teased, or frustrated. Credit: 2 hours

Taming The Dragon In Your Child: Solutions for Breaking the Cycle of Family Anger

by Meg Eastman

This book discusses how to determine whether anger is a normal expression of hurt, fear, and frustration, or if it is a warning sign of a more serious cycle of family stress. Practical answers about how to stop angry tirades and teach children to express anger responsibly are provided. Credit: 4 hours

Managing the Defiant Child

by Russell A. Barkley

Sometimes parents need to modify their own behavior in order to change their child's behavior. The day to day struggles of three families who have children with Oppositional Defiant Disorder (ODD) are followed in the video.

Credit: 30 minutes

Common Sense Discipline: Building Self-Esteem in Young Children

by Grace Mitchell

This book provides you with information and strategies on successfully disciplining your child. You will learn to teach children to feel better about themselves and enable them to be "happy and confident" so they may not feel the need to act out. Real life stories are used as examples. Credit: 4 hours

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To borrow these or one of the myriad titles in the Lending Library, simply fill out the order form at the back of the catalogue. Send it to the DCFS Office of Training, Station 122, 406 E. Monroe, Springfield IL 62701.

To request a catalogue, call 877-800-3393. The catalogue is also available on the DCFS web site: <http://www.state.il.us/DCFS/docs/lendinglibrary.pdf>.

Lending Library Categories

- Child Sexual Abuse
- Children with Sexually Aggressive Behaviors
- Children with Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)
- Children with Behavioral Disorders/Emotional Disturbances
- Disciplinary Strategies for Difficult Children
- Separation and Visitation
- Drug-Affected Infants and Children
- Fetal Alcohol Syndrome/Effects (FAS/FAE)
- The Medically Complex Child
- The Child With HIV/AIDS
- Promoting Educational Success Through Improved Learning Skills
- Building A Healthy Self-Esteem in Kids
- From Foster Care to Adoption
- Child Development and Parenting
- Parenting Adolescents
- Families and Diversity-Parenting with Greater Understanding
- Children With Mental Health, Language and Physical Challenges